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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3701
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5846
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3554
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3413
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4088
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001416

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, INL/AAE BUHLER

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: FAMOUS POP STAR IMPLICATED IN
DRUG CASE; BANISHED

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: A popular Turkmen female singer was reportedly detained with drugs and sent into internal exile. The report could not be officially confirmed, but several sources provided details. Drug use has been a traditional habit among Turkmen singers and some of them enjoyed immunity for this illegal practice under ex-President Niyazov's regime. In this case, the singer's growing popularity might have contributed to her troubles. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) Famous Turkmen singer Lachin Mammedova was reportedly detained for possession of drugs last week. It is not clear whether the 31 year old Turkmen pop star and Miss Intervision 2008 (a Russian version of Eurovision music competition) was detained for smuggling or for possession, which is usually qualified as "for personal use." According to a source, Mammedova was detained at Ashgabat airport upon arrival from Dashoguz, following her performance at the wedding party of Rejep Saparov's nephew. (Note: Rejep Saparov - former Deputy Chairman and Administrator of the Presidential Apparatus. End Note.) Due to her popularity and title of People's Artist of Turkmenistan, awarded to her by President Berdimuhamedov last year, she was not sent to prison, but was given two days to move out of Ashgabat.

¶4. (SBU) While post's police contact refused to provide any comment on this story, another government official confirmed that Lachin was sent into internal exile to her hometown in Balkan Province. The same official added that Mammedova had become too popular, hanging around with radio-equipped bodyguards. Her high profile probably attracted the attention of the president's sisters, who decided to take action against her.

However, a source from Mammedova's husband's family (Note: Mammedova recently married a 20 year old student from Turkmenabad, named Ygtyyar, whose mother is the Director of the Turkmenabad Central Trade market. End Note.) rejected the rumors, stating that they were false and that Mammedova was not involved in any drug incident. Meanwhile, Mammedova's videos have not been broadcast on national television for the past several days.

15. (SBU) Historically, drug use has been a common practice among Turkmen singers and "bahshy" (musicians singing and playing on the national instruments). A bahshy that was invited to perform at a wedding party was not only served food and drink and well paid, but also provided with opium and/or hashish (depending on his preference) during the performance. Similarly, many contemporary Turkmen singers are addicted to drugs. Ex-President Niyazov, who was a Turkmen music fan, unofficially provided immunity to many of them, which allowed pop stars to take drugs openly. For instance, People's Artist Atabay Charygulyev (who died early this year, supposedly from an overdose) was a heroin addict, and was once detained by police for heroin possession, but freed by the ex-President's order. Another pop star, Nurmhammet Meredov (aka Nury Kosoy - Cock Eyed), reportedly has to perform without payment at the parties of high-ranking counternarcotics officials in order to preserve his immunity for taking drugs. (Note: The fee for Turkmen singers at a wedding party varies from USD 500 to 10,000, depending on the singer's popularity. End Note.)

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Taking into consideration Mammedova's

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popularity, including "admiration" by President Berdimuhamedov, it is likely that the drug scandal, if it happened, was immediately covered up before it received much public attention. Mammedova had become so popular that a video of her wedding party became a hit among local movie rentals. Perhaps, in a system that won't allow for any artist, business person, athlete, or anyone else in the country to become more popular than the president, Mammedova had reached too far. END COMMENT.

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